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Article

Listen Up Leaders!

Some Thoughts on Biblical Leaders & Finishing Well

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Abstract

This paper gives the results of a comparative study of leaders in the Bible--mostly Old Testament leaders. Four observations resulted.

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| Observation 1. | Few leaders finish well. |
| Observation 2. | Leadership is difficult. |
| Observation 3. | God's enabling presence is the essential ingredient of successful leadership. |
| Observation 4. | Spiritual leadership can make a difference. |

These four observations form the basis for discussion which in fact turns these observations into challenges for leadership today.

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What To Look For

Answers to the following questions should focus your attention as you read this article.

1. What are several categories of finishes?
2. From the study of leaders for which data is available, about how many finish well?
3. What is a critical incident? a pivotal point?
4. What are the five things that leaders can do to help them finish well?
5. How is a Christian leader defined?
6. What is leadership backlash? Is it fairly common?
7. What is the central ingredient of leadership?

Exercises

1. Identify any pivotal points to date in your leadership. Give each pivotal point a label. Then tell why you consider it a pivotal point. Was it a springboard to other ministry? Was it a major setback?
2. Look carefully at the list of the four observations. Which of these four observations is probably most important to you at this present stage of your development? Identify which observation. Then give some explanation as to why it is important for you.

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**Listen Up Leaders!
Forewarned is Forearmed!**

A repeated reading of the Bible with a focus on leadership reveals four crucial observations fraught with leadership implications:

- Observation 1. Few leaders finish well.
- Observation 2. Leadership is difficult.
- Observation 3. God's enabling presence is the essential ingredient of successful leadership.
- Observation 4. Spiritual leadership can make a difference.

Can we learn from them? Can we in fact see in them 4 challenges that can make a difference in our leadership?

Observation 1: Few Leaders Finish Well

The Bible mentions between 100 and 300 leaders. Some receive only scant notice.¹ Others receive prolonged treatment.² Recently I listed³ 100 of the more prominent leaders and did some research on their leadership. These included some of each of the major Old Testament types: patriarchal, military, civil, formal religious (priests), informal religious (prophets), charismatic. They also included the major New Testament types: apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors. Of the 100 listed only about half of them had enough information to tell how they finished.⁴

I identified several categories of finishes:

- 1. cut off early,
- 2. finished poorly,
- 3. finished "so so" (limited somehow),
- 4. finished well,
- 5. can't be sure.

Cut off early⁵ means they were taken out of leadership (assassinations, killed in battle, prophetically denounced, overthrown). Some of these were traced directly to God's doing. Finished poorly⁶ means they were going down hill in the latter part of their ministry. This might mean in terms of their personal relationship with God or in terms of competency in their ministry or both. Finished "so so"⁷ means they did not do what

they potentially could have done or should have done. They did not complete what God had for them to do. This might mean that there were some negative ramifications from their ministry or reign which lingered on even though they were walking with God personally at the end of their lives. Finished well⁸ means they were walking with God personally at the end of their lives and probably contributed to God's purposes at some high realized level of potential. Some leaders who receive scant treatment probably did finish well but data concerning their finish is not available in the Bible.

Now the data isn't conclusive. And one might question what I mean by finish well. More on that later. But there is enough information to justify a first major observation from the Bible concerning leadership.

FEW LEADERS FINISH WELL!

Of those on which information was available less than 30% finished well. Now that is a startling conclusion. It should frighten any present day leader who desires to count for God. But what can we do about it?

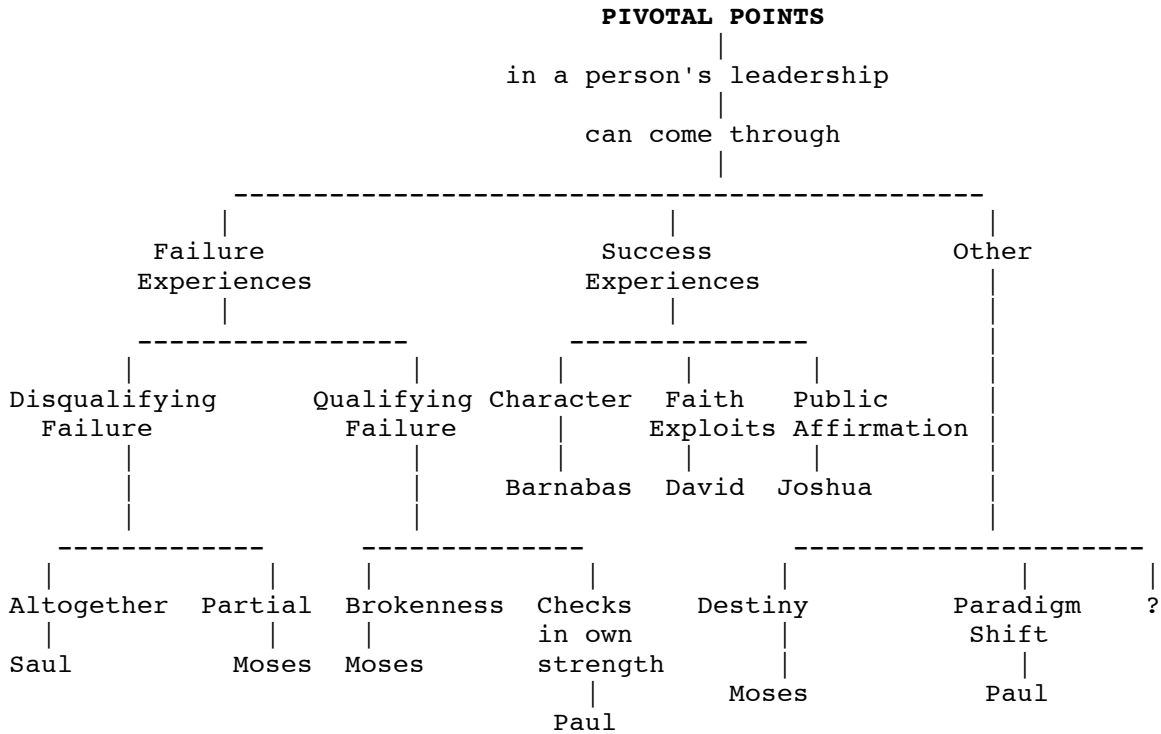
One, we can study why these leaders failed to finish well. Two New Testament passages, I Corinthians 10:6 and Romans 15:4 point out to us that history in the Bible is meant to teach us today lessons for our own lives. I'll suggest some other things we can do later on. But let me follow up on the first one by suggesting an important finding I saw in comparing leaders who finished well and those who didn't.

My preliminary study of some of these leaders and in-depth study of others indicates that for many of them there were critical times in their lives in which decisions were made⁹ that affected all of the rest of their lives and ministries. I call these times pivotal points. A pivotal point in a leader's life is a critical time of God's dealing with that leader. The leader's response to God's processing will carry significant implications for the rest of the leadership. At the end of life one can trace back to that point in time and identify it as having done at least one of three things. The pivotal point can,

1. curtail further use of the leader by God or at least curtail expansion of the leader's potential.
2. limit the eventual use of the leader for ultimate purposes that otherwise could have been accomplished,
3. enhance or open up the leader for expansion or contribution to the ultimate purposes in God's kingdom.

Saul typifies result one in two pivotal points which tested his integrity and obedience in I Samuel 13:7-14 and 15:10-35. Moses exemplifies the second. His act in striking the Rock to provide water in Numbers 20:11,12 prevented God from allowing him to take the Israelites into the promised land--which should have been the culminating ultimate contribution of his ministry. Daniel's response to the integrity check in Daniel chapter 1 illustrates the third kind of pivotal point as was Joseph's response to temptation from Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39.

A tentative categorization results in the following tree diagram for classifying pivotal points.



Some Observations About Pivotal Points

Biblical leader's that I have meditated on so far seem to have a range of from 1 to 3 pivotal points. That is, there is frequently more than one pivotal point that serves as "conditional road map markers" in a life. Moses slaying of the Egyptian, his sense of destiny experience at the burning bush, and his striking of the rock are typical examples of pivotal points.

Due to the highly intentional selection of Bible material, the New Testament commentary on an Old Testament leader probably will signal pivotal points. Pivotal points probably can't really be evaluated except with post-life retrospective reflection. At this point studying and identifying pivotal points can furnish us with warnings for our own lives and point out the ways that God frequently processes leaders at critical junctures of their lives. We may not be able to know at the moment if something happening to us is pivotal or not; hence we must exercise extreme caution as we respond to God. The more familiar we are with Biblical leaders and with the processes used by God in their emergence the more sensitive we will be to God's dealing with our own lives. That a single incident in my life may be strongly determinative for the rest of my leadership will certainly cause me to see the importance of a daily sensitive walk with God via the Holy Spirit. Forewarned is forearmed!

Is Finishing Well A Valid Goal?

But is finishing well a valid goal? I think so for three reasons. One from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament.

Moses certainly admonishes toward this direction in Psalm 90, one of the oldest writings in the Psalter. The psalm is evidently written toward the end of his life. Looking back over life, Moses reflects on just how short life is, especially when viewed from God's eternal vantage point. He is concerned with having a life that counts. Verses 12 and 17 carry this thrust. I like to paraphrase verse 12 this way, "teach us to wisely apply ourselves so that our lives count." Moses' heart cry in verse 17 is that God will establish his work, that is, make the efforts of his lifetime count. Moses was the greatest Old Testament leader. He wasn't perfect. But he didn't want his life wasted. He wanted it to count in spite of the mistakes that limited his final accomplishment.

The most celebrated leader in the New Testament church, Paul the Apostle, closes his life with a challenging evaluation. In some of his final remarks to Timothy, Paul recognizes that his end is near. He has no regrets for how his life has been lived. In II Timothy 4:7,8 he reflects triumphantly on his accomplishments. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing." Early on Paul knew that God had a special destiny for him (Acts 26:16-19). Throughout his life Paul was careful to discipline himself so that he could accomplish that destiny and finish well (I Corinthians 9:24, II Timothy 4:7,8). Paul knew that his life was a model for other leaders. His final words suggest that finishing well is a worthwhile goal for any leader who is "occupying till He comes."

Besides a great Old Testament and a great New Testament leader's concerns for effective lives that count there are the teachings of Jesus which should confirm in us a desire to finish well. In the stewardship parables of Jesus in particular, and in the accountability passages of the New Testament, in general, we are warned and commanded to use our resources and potential in such a way as to count for the Kingdom. There will be a final accountability. Such parables as the Laborers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20, the Waiting Servants in Matthew 24, The Ten Virgins and the Ten Talents in Matthew 25, the Worldly Wise Steward in Luke 16 and the Pounds in Luke 19 all stress that there will be an ultimate accounting. Our conduct in ministry should always bear this in mind. Our lives must not be wasted. We must build upon what God has given us.

The general judgment passages in Romans 14:11,12, I Corinthians 3:5-9 and 12-15, II Corinthians 5:10, Philippians 2:10,11 and Hebrews 9:27 also reinforce the concept of ultimate accountability. Accountability for our lives and the warning

that few leaders do finish well should sober us to the task before us as leaders. What can we do?

5 Things We Can Do To Help Us Finish Well

I have already mentioned one thing we can do about finishing well. Let me highlight it further. We need to study Bible leaders in order to identify how God processed them toward their leadership. We need to learn the lessons from the past concerning leaders--the positive ones and the negative ones. We should exploit the promise of the leadership mandate of Hebrews 13:7,8 to the fullest.

Remember your former leaders who spoke God's message to you. Think back on how they lived and died, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

I have been doing intensive study of leader's lives over the past 8 years. Leadership emergence theory is the result of that research.¹⁰ Its many concepts can help us understand more fully just how God does shape a leader over a lifetime.

A second thing we can do involves recognition that most leaders who have been effective over a lifetime have needed and welcomed renewal experiences from time to time in their lives. Some times are more crucial in terms of renewal than others. Apparently in western society the mid-thirty's and early forty's and mid-fifty's are crucial times in which renewal is frequently needed in a leader's life. Frequently during these critical periods discipline slacks, there is a tendency to plateau and rely on one's past experience and skills, and a sense of confusion concerning achievement and new direction prevail. Unusual renewal experiences with God can overcome these tendencies and redirect a leader. An openness for them, a willingness to take steps to receive them, and a knowledge of their importance for a whole life can be vital factors in heeding step two for finishing well. Sometimes these renewal experiences are divinely originated by God and we must be sensitive to his invitation. At other times we must initiate the renewal efforts.

A third thing we can do to help insure a good finish is to guard our inner life with God. The spiritual disciplines have proven helpful in this regard to many earlier generations of leaders. Spiritual disciplines can be generally defined to include activities of mind and body which are purposefully undertaken in order to bring personality and total being into effective cooperation with the Spirit of God so as to reflect Kingdom life.

I concur with Paul's admonitions to discipline as a means of insuring perseverance in the ministry. When Paul was around 50 years of age he wrote to the Corinthian church what appears to be both an exhortation to the Corinthians and an explanation of a major leadership value in his own life. We need to keep in mind that he had been in ministry for about 21 years. He was still advocating strong discipline. I paraphrase it in my own words.

I am serious about finishing well in my Christian ministry. I discipline myself for fear that after challenging others into the Christian life I myself might become a casualty.

Lack of physical discipline is often an indicator of laxity in the spiritual life as well. Toward the end of his life, Paul is probably between 65 and 70, he is still advocating discipline. This time he writes to Timothy, who is probably between 30 and 35 years old.

...Take time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit. Bodily fitness has a limited value, but spiritual fitness is of unlimited value for it holds promise both for the present life and for the life to come. (II Timothy 4:7b,8 Phillips)

Leaders should from time to time assess their state of discipline. I recommend in addition to standard word disciplines involving the devotional life and study of the Bible other disciplines such as solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy. My studies of Foster and Willard have helped me identify¹¹ a number of disciplines which can habitually shape character and increase the probability of a good finish.

A fourth suggestion to aiding a good finish is a simple one which flows from an important lesson that I have observed in comparing the lives of effective leaders. "Effective leaders maintain a learning posture all their lives." It sounds simple enough but many leaders don't heed it.

Two Biblical leaders who certainly were learners all their lives and exemplified this principle were Daniel and Paul. Note how Daniel observed this principle. In Daniel 9 when he is quite old we find that he was still studying his Bible and still learning new things from it. And he was alert to what God wanted to do through what he was learning. Consequently, Daniel was able to intercede for his people and become a recipient of one of the great messianic revelations. Paul's closing remarks to Timothy show he was still learning. "And when you come don't forget the books Timothy!" (II Timothy 4:13).

In western culture, maintaining a learning posture usually involves reading. Countless materials are available on leadership. You should acquire skills which will allow you to read broadly and selectively the many resources that are now being published. I have learned selective reading techniques¹² which have allowed me to learn what I need to know without reading every word of a book. This has helped me to increase the range and number of books I read.

A helpful accountability model I have used is the buddy reading model.¹³ I have a reading buddy. We covenant together to read a book, do certain exercises in conjunction with the book, and then meet to share our learning. We alternate choices of book. My buddy picks it for one month. I do so the next month.

There are many non-formal training events available such as workshops, seminars, and conferences covering a variety of learning skills. Take advantage of them. A good learning posture is insurance against plateauing and a helpful prod along the way to persevere in leadership. An inflexible spirit with regards to learning is almost a sure precursor to finishing "so so" or "poorly."

A fifth and final suggestion for aiding and abetting a good finish involves the concept of mentoring. Comparative study of many leaders lives indicates the frequency with which other people were significant in challenging them into leadership and in giving timely advice and help so as to keep them there.

Two categories of influential people have been identified--the divine contact, and the mentor. A divine contact is a special kind of mentor that appears on the scene at a timely moment to give a word or other help from God to an emerging leader just when that word or help is really needed. This appropriate transfer of information is perceived as from God and is usually momentous in some sort of major guidance decision by the emerging leader.

The general notion of mentoring involves a relational process in which someone who knows something (the mentor) passes on something (wisdom, advice, information, emotional support, protection, linking to resources) to someone who needs it (the mentoree, protege) at a sensitive time so that it impacts the person's development. The basic dynamics of mentoring include relationship, submission, and accountability. My observations on mentoring suggest that most likely, any leader will need a mentor at all times over a lifetime of leadership. Mentoring is available if one looks for specific functions and people who can do them (rather than an ideal mentor who can do all). God will provide a mentor in a specific area of need for you if you trust Him for one and you are willing to submit and accept responsibility.

Simply stated the final suggestion for enabling a good finish is find a mentor who will hold you accountable in your spiritual life and ministry and who can warn and advise so as to enable you to avoid pitfalls and to grow throughout your lifetime of ministry.

Few leaders finish well. But more can finish well if they are determined under God to do so. A natural challenge flows from this observation. **Set a lifetime goal to finish well.** By finishing well I mean walking with God in a vibrant personal relationship, developing the potential God has given to its appropriate capacity, and leaving behind an ultimate contribution that is both pleasing to God and established by Him.

Observation 2. Leadership is difficult

A second observation on leadership that we see from the Bible is a simple one. We see it when we study leader's lives. We see it when we analyze how they finished. We see it when we

identify pivotal points in a life. We sense it in our own lives. It is a bit frightening. Simply stated, here it is.

**LEADERSHIP IS DIFFICULT; IT CARRIES WITH IT
INHERENT RISKS,
HEAVY RESPONSIBILITIES, AND
GREAT REWARDS.**

One almost wonders then, why any young person would actually aspire to leadership. Certainly they should not do so without eyes wide open to the difficulties of leadership.

A Christian leader is a person with God-given capacity and God-given responsibility who is influencing a specific group of God's people towards God's purposes for the group. Leadership is all that is involved in influencing those people. Problems come with the turf--that is what the God-given responsibility is all about. This process is not a simple one. How do we know leadership is difficult? What are some of the difficulties?

The very fact that few leaders finish well, which we have already developed in detail, suggests that leadership is difficult. Maybe we are lulled into thinking leadership is easy. After all, 2 out of 3 servants in both the Talents and Pounds parables finished well and heard, "Well, Done, thou good and faithful servant." But the Biblical record shows that few finish well and even suggests some of the difficulties.

Most leaders face a life of added pressure and stress. Overworked is the expected norm by followers. Frequently they are misunderstood and criticized even by close and previously loyal followers. This is certainly the case with the two prominent leaders, Moses in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament.

In Exodus 18 Jethro observed that Moses was overworked and suggested a remedy. Note his warning!

What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. (Exodus 18:17,18)

In this case the work was too much to be accomplished. Yet the people had needs. Moses tried to meet them all. Paul, too, seemingly was overworked. I think he was to blame. A reading of his travels in the Acts and his epistles shows the deep concern he had for accomplishing his mission, for caring for the churches, and the active life he led. Overworked leaders will find leadership difficult.

One expects criticism from enemies or outsiders to the ministry. One thing that makes top level Christian leadership so difficult is the unexpected criticism that comes from insiders--from followers and even mid-level leaders. Note in Numbers 12:1,2 that the criticism comes from fellow leaders Aaron and Miriam. In some of his most intimate Psalms, David frequently refers to critics who are slandering him.¹⁴ Paul's Corinthian

letters are responses to criticism of his leadership.¹⁵ Criticism can be helpful if it points us to improvement. But generally what it does is wear a leader down. Leadership is difficult because leaders are frequently under fire and are being criticized.

Leadership backlash succinctly identifies a particularly devastating kind of criticism that makes leadership difficult. Followers who previously agreed to a leader's vision and plan turn on that leader when unexpected ramifications come as a result of implementing the plan. Usually the unforeseen ramifications involve persecution or hard times of some kind. And though followers may have agreed originally that the course of action was proper they now blame the leader for having taken it. Moses experiences in Exodus 5 when attempting to free the Israelites from Pharaoh's dominion typify this process. His experience in Exodus 16 after having freed them from that dominion also show this kind of reaction.

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "if only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." (Exodus 16:2,3)

In fact, this kind of critical process occurs so frequently that a pattern can be established. The full cycle of this leadership pressure includes:

1. The leader gets a **vision** (some direction) from God.
2. The followers **are convinced** of the direction.
3. The leader and followers **move in the direction** suggested.
4. Then comes the **unexpected ramifications**--persecution, hard times, or attacks from Satan--spiritual warfare is common.
5. There is **backlash** from the followers. They now question the leader's earlier actions with the value of hindsight. Usually the criticism quickly moves from the strategy that was undertaken to the person of the leader.
6. The leader is driven to God to **reconfirm** the action and get God's affirmation in spite of the backlash.
7. God **reveals Himself further** and makes it clear that He will deliver.
8. God **vindicates Himself** and the leader.

The cycle isn't always complete. A discouraged leader may often miss stages 6, 7 and 8. An important leadership principle is embedded in the backlash process. "Success begets problems." Leadership is indeed difficult for success not only solves problems it also brings with it new unexpected problems.

Leadership is not only difficult but it carries with it inherent risks. A major risk concerns power. Leaders influence others. You don't influence without power. Various kinds of power bases can be used by leaders to give the leverage needed

for influencing. But no matter what power bases are used leaders often begin to assume privileges because of the power they have. The common dictum often attributed to Lord Acton describes this trend. "Power tends to corrupt. Absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely." Power used for one's personal gain or self-interest tempts many a leader. Many fall.

The major antidote requires balance. Leaders must influence. This takes power. But leaders must serve followers also. The **towel** of John 13 reminds us of the needed corrective. Power is not for the benefit of the leader alone. Power is necessary for leadership. It carries with it risks. But it can also be greatly used by a leader for God's purposes. Wrong, a leading power theoretician,¹⁶ reminds us of this by adding a corrective supplement to Lord Acton's dictum. He adds that power also enables and ennobles one to accomplish great good for followers.

Leadership carries with it heavy responsibilities. Three such include ultimate accountability for ministry, modelling expectations, and higher standards.

Hebrews 13:17 lays out the "accountability" responsibility clearly in an admonition given to followers.

Obey your leaders and follow their orders. They watch over your souls without resting, **since they must give to God an account of their service.** If you obey them they will do this work gladly; if not, they will do it with sadness, and that would be of no help to you. (Good News)

Moses certainly felt this burden. In the backlash incident previously referred to he lifted his inner feelings to God.

Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, Give us meat to eat. I can not carry all these people by myself, the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now--if I have found favor in your eyes--and do not let me face my own ruin. (Numbers 11:10-15)

Many a leader somehow wishes that the burden of accountability for followers could be lifted. But it is there and makes leadership difficult.

Leaders are on display. So too their families. Whether or not they like this or want it, it happens. Paul embraced it and used it to his advantage in exhorting followers and in training emerging leaders. His exhortation to the Philippians in 4:9 shows what a vital role a leader's modelling can play. His

admonition to Timothy in II Timothy 3:10,11 certainly shows that Paul was aware of constant modelling. But the downside is there too. Both a leader's pluses and minuses are modeled. And that carries with it great responsibility and added pressure. Not all leaders can so readily embrace modelling as an active part of their ministry. But it is there and makes leadership difficult.

A final heavy responsibility, that I will mention, is subtly carried in the emphasized phrase in the following warning from James.

My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that **we shall receive the greater condemnation.** (James 3:1)

Leaders have higher standards before God because of their influence upon followers. Jesus highlights this principle in the closing remarks to his stewardship parable of Luke 12:42-48.

... For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask more. (Luke 12:48)

Moses' own life illustrates this. In a moment of anger, in response to the continual whinings of his followers, he strikes the rock in Numbers 20. God had told him to speak to the rock. The water flowed as God graciously provided for the followers. But both Moses and Aaron were rebuked by God for this incident. God's punishment seems harsh.

But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." (Numbers 20:12)

Because leaders carry such prestige, exert so much power, and influence so many they must meet higher standards of conduct and ethics. That is a great responsibility making leadership a challenging and difficult task. Leadership is difficult. It does carry inherent risks. It has its heavy responsibilities. But there is the bright side--the rewards of leadership. Daniel learned of this toward the end of his life. In response to a self-initiated time for renewal in which Daniel fasted, disciplined himself, mourned and prayed for three weeks God gave a vision. At the conclusion of the vision Daniel received some encouraging words, what I call the bright side of leadership.

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. (Daniel 12:3)

Peter affirms this bright side of leadership in his personal chat to fellow pastors.

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that never fades away. (I Peter 5:4)

Paul too, in a more general statement affirms the notion of rewards. He is writing to a leader and talking about himself, a leader. It is clear the statement applies to leaders and others beyond. His encouragement is to those who finish well looking towards Christ's return.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (II Timothy 4:8)

Observation 2 on leadership from the Bible sobers potential leaders and warns present leaders. Leadership is difficult. It carries with it many risks. It does assume heavy responsibilities on a leader. But it does bring both present and eternal rewards. No one should opt for Christian leadership lightly. Without a solid leading by God no one should take on Christian leadership. Yet most of us have little choice. We are stewards. God has given us gifts, privileges, opportunities, and resources. He has called us to lead. We can do no less.

What is the challenge in observation 2? Two concepts are involved: recognition and determination. I have only begun to list difficulties of leadership. You could add to my list I'm sure. Step 1 of the challenge involves recognition that the difficulties of leadership are part of the responsibilities of leadership. Embrace them as "part and parcel" with the job. Don't fret under them. Accept them as challenges from God. Step 2 involves will power. By an act of the will determine that you will not only accept difficulties of leadership as part of the responsibility of it but also see them as part of God's means for developing you as a leader. Determine ahead of time to have a mindset that views God's hand in the difficulties. A pre-meditative purposeful heart is less likely to waver when the difficulties come. Daniel's example in Daniel 1:8 shows the value of pre-determination on an issue.

Observation 3. The Essential Ingredient of Leadership

Years ago back in New York University when I was studying real variable theory we quite frequently used a phrase, "necessary and sufficient." Usually we were trying to establish conditions under which a theorem would hold. A certain condition may be necessary in a proof but not sufficient to guarantee a proof. But one or more conditions sometimes would prove to be necessary and sufficient. Not only must you have them but also if you do have them then it is guaranteed. This third observation on leadership is just such a condition. It states a necessary condition for any Biblical leadership; and it is a sufficient condition to guarantee that leadership. Let me illustrate it both positively and negatively from Scripture.

Genesis 39 repeats an interesting concept when describing Joseph's response to very negative circumstances first under Potiphar and then in prison. Verses 2, 3, 21, and 23 contain the phrases. Verses 2 and 3 describe Joseph's state under Potiphar. Verses 21 and 23 refer to his time in prison. Notice the common denominator.

- verse 2 And the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man.
- verse 3 And his master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.
- verse 21 But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.
- verse 23 The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.

The New Testament highlights this same feature when it gives Joseph's ultimate testimony--a fitting epitaph.

And the patriarchs moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. (Acts 7:9)

Joseph's story is a marvelous illustration of a leader who submitted to God in his circumstances and saw God's affirmation. James, though not referring to Joseph, describes his situation exactly when he commands his hearers "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up." Peter uses almost exactly the same phrases when talking to leaders and followers.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time. (I Peter 5:6)

Joseph was able to do so because of the presence of God. "God was with him" is the encouraging theme for Joseph. And it is this theme that I am stating as a major observation on leadership in the Bible.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF A LEADER IS NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT FOR LEADERSHIP.

Once this simple concept is acknowledged it leaps out at you from the pages of the Bible. Now there are many things that are helpful for good leadership. There are some that are even necessary. But this seems to supersede them all and is at the root of all effective spiritual leadership.

When God accosts Moses at the burning bush and gives the leadership challenge that will eventually free a nation the enabling promise with the call is this necessary and sufficient condition for leadership.

Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And he said, **Certainly I will be with thee;** and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have

sent thee: When thou has brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. (Exodus 3:10-12)

Moses found that promise sufficient. Later, in the Old Testament exhaustive treatment of the concept, Exodus 33 he shows its necessity. In a running dialog with God, Moses brings out the necessity of the presence of God for his leadership. In verses 2, 3 God says I will not go with you.

And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: unto a land flowing with milk and honey: for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for though art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way.

Later after some intimate time with God Moses intercedes on behalf of Israel and hears the words he knows will sustain him in the major leadership challenges that lie ahead. And he expresses the necessity of the condition.

Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people.

And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.

And he said unto him, **If thy presence go not with me,** carry us not up hence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? is it not in that thou goest with us? so shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth.

And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for though hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name. (Exodus 33:13-17)

Moses goes on to ask for and receive a special intimate visitation of God.

This same concept, the presence of God, forms the backbone of the promises given to Joshua as he embarks on his faith challenge of leading the Israelites into the land.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of a good courage. be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God **is with thee** withersoever thou goest. (Joshua 1:9)

And Joshua's followers utter the same concept as a necessary condition of his leadership.

According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so we will hearken unto thee: **nly the Lord thy God be with thee** as he was with Moses. (Joshua 1:17)

This follower demand was met. God promised to reveal his mighty presence and establish Joshua in Joshua 3:7.

And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. (Joshua 3:7)

He does so and establishes Joshua's leadership as recorded in Joshua 4:14.

On that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life. (Joshua 4:14)

"I will be with thee" is the necessary and sufficient condition of Godly leadership. You can trace this in the life of David, the Godly prophets, and any other Old Testament leader who counted for God. When a leader is challenged by God for a leadership task He never promises riches or power as the necessary enablement--just His presence.

This concept receives New Testament validation. Jesus' challenge of the Great Commission is capped with the promise, "All power is given unto me . . . and lo **I am with you always** even unto the end of the age."

In Corinth, Paul faced opposition from the Jews. God challenged him to stay on in Corinth. Again the necessary and sufficient condition of Paul's leadership is seen in the vision given to Paul.

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For **I am with thee**, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:9,10)

This is just one of the many realizations of the promise that Jesus made to Paul on the road to Damascus when he gave him his life vision.

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things in the which **I will appear** unto thee. (Acts 26:16)

The author of the Hebrews widens the audience to even more than leaders.

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, **I will never leave thee**, nor forsake thee. (Hebrews 13:5)

The presence of God--it is enough. And it is a must for leadership.

The challenge flowing from this observation appears simple enough.

**A LEADER MUST HAVE THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HIS/HER LIFE,
AMONG HIS/HER PEOPLE, AND IN THE LEADERSHIP SITUATIONS
FACED.**

If you are to lead with assurance you must have the presence of God. You must cultivate an intimacy with God. You must be able to sense His working in your life, your decisions, your followers, your plans, and your leadership situation. The presence of God includes his enabling power for what he desires in your life. And you like Moses, if you have intimacy with God, will not be afraid to say, "Lord, I can't do this without your presence. If you are not in it, I'm getting out."

Observation 4. Spiritual leadership can make a difference.

Back in the late sixty's I studied the prophets under Buck Hatch at Columbia Bible College. One assignment required us to chart the kings along a time-line, locate the prophets along the time-line, and assess the state of the kingdoms in terms of spiritual health. This required us to go to the scriptures and work out the details. I soon knew to look for two phrases that signaled spiritual and non-spiritual kings. "He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord" or "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord." Each of the phrases always had qualifiers. Some did right except for a few items. Some did evil more than anyone before them.

My chart when finished graphically displayed the observation that spiritual leadership can make a difference. All of the northern kings did not follow God. The northern kingdom deteriorated rapidly until finally the Assyrian crisis. Sennacherib destroyed them. The southern kingdom lasted much longer. There were several "spiritual kings" including Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, and Josiah. The trend was downward but the rapid downward pace was definitely slowed by the spiritual kings. Finally after Josiah each of the kings were non-spiritual and the trend continues downward until God brought final punishment via Babylonia.

Spiritual leaders other than kings also had impact. Jehoiada, a "spiritual" priest advised Jehoash. He mentored young Jehoash and had a decidedly good impact on the kingdom.

In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign; and forty years reigned he in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoiada the priest instructed him. (II Kings 12:1,2)

After Jehoiada's death, Jehoash faltered and did not follow the Lord wholeheartedly. He was eventually assassinated. Uzziah, a later king in the southern kingdom, followed a similar pattern--but being influenced by a prophetic adviser.

Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. And he did that which was

right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did. And he sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God: and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper. (II Chronicles 26:3-5)

Later Uzziah's pride led to his downfall. He used his power and privilege to usurp the religious authority of the priests and God punished him for it. But in both cases, Jehoash and Uzziah, it is clear that spiritual leadership made a decided difference in their rule.

The opposite is seen too. Jeroboam in II Chronicles 11 appointed ungodly religious priests.

For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the Lord: And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. (II Chronicles 11:13-15)

Jeroboam's rule became exceedingly wicked so much so that it is used as the qualifier for evil reigns of many of the kings after him. They did evil in the sight of the Lord as did Jeroboam.

The negative side is also seen with Rehoboam, Solomon's son in II Chronicles 10. He followed the poor advice of his young colleagues. Advice that was not from God. That decision brought about the split of the kingdom into the northern and southern kingdoms.

The general principle holds no matter what type of leader. There were spiritual types of every kind of Old Testament leader whether

- o patriarchal (Abraham, Joseph),
- o military (Joshua),
- o civil (Uzziah, Jotham, Hezekiah, Josiah, Nehemiah),
- o formal religious (priests--Jehoiada),
- o informal religious (prophets--Nathan, Gad, Elijah, Elisha), or
- o charismatic (Caleb).

There were also non-spiritual leaders of every type. And there is a decided difference. Whenever there was spiritual leadership there followed renewal, reform, or at least testimony to God and His righteous demands, and God's blessing. Frequently the line was spared God's judgment. Where non-spiritual leaders impacted just the opposite happened. The spiritual tone of God's people declined. They followed after other gods. They were disciplined. God's judgment fell upon them.

Spiritual leadership can make a difference. Is this observation needed today? I think so for two reasons. One, leaders can be spiritual and lose it over their lifetime. Two, in the light of overwhelming trends and circumstances in our world, we as leaders, may tend to become cynical about the

effects of our leadership. We may tend to give up and not believe that what we do really matters.

Asa illustrates the first reason. II Chronicles 14 and 15 tell the story. To use a chess analogy he had a good opening game and a good middle game. But he faltered in the end game. It is not enough to begin well. We must also continue well. And maybe more importantly we must end well. In his earlier years Asa was driven by crises to trust God for deliverance. The situations were beyond Asa's own ability. Toward the end of his life Asa faced crises without that same desperate sense of trusting in God alone for the answer. He "worked out his solutions." And he even refused God's answers when given via prophetic revelation. That is a tendency seen also in my comparative studies of contemporary leaders. In latter ministry, the tendency is to rely on competency, one's ability to do things, rather than primarily on God.

Solomon's life illuminates the need for this observation. He probably more than any Old Testament leader typifies both reasons--loss of spirituality and cynicism. He began well. Tremendous spiritual tone exuded from Solomon's wise early years of leadership. God gave him a wonderful and yet threatening promise.

And as for thee, if thou wilt walk before me, as David thy father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded thee, and shalt observe my statutes and my judgments; Then will I stablish the throne of thy kingdom, according as I have covenanted with David thy father, saying, There shall not fail thee a man to be ruler in Israel. But if ye turn away, and forsake my statutes and my commandments, which I have set before you, and shall go and serve other gods and worship them; Then will I pluck them up by the roots out of my land which I have given them; and this house which I have sanctified for my name, will I cast out of my sight, and will make it to be a proverb and a byword among all nations. (II Chronicles 7:17-20)

Solomon had everything going for him. He was physically attractive, had brains, wealth, and peace and prosperity during almost his entire reign. Yet, he lost his spirituality.

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father. (I Kings 11:3-6)

If Solomon did write Ecclesiastes then it seems clear that he became rather cynical as he grew older. The book carries that tone. Essentially life is not worth living. Our accomplishments do not really matter. Whether that is true or not it is the case that some leaders tend toward cynicism as they grow old. Perhaps they have been battered in their leadership. Maybe it does

appear that their leadership has not counted. We need to be reminded that spiritual leadership always makes a difference. Sometimes we will see the difference. At other times we will not. But we must believe that it will.

On the positive side consider one who did not become cynical later in life. Consider one who finished spiritually strong.

And, behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you and not one thing hath failed thereof. (Joshua 23:14)

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. (Joshua 24:14,15)

Joshua maintained his spirituality right to the end. His life counted. His spirituality impacted his generation. His model should be at least a minimum for our leadership.

And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel. (Joshua 24:31)

But we should think even beyond and determine to impact the following generations.

And Joshua, the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the northside of the hill Gaash.

And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. (Judges 2:9-12)

Joshua's model is positive. He maintained spirituality. He trusted in God till the very end. He impacted his own generation and the one immediately following.

A major way that spiritual leadership impacts is modelling. The model of a life lived for God will impact, if not directly on

the situation as hoped for, at least on people who follow. Spiritual models, heroes and heroines will always count for God.

In the Bible spiritual leadership counted in many other ways than just modelling. It brought reform and justice. It brought spiritual renewal. It frequently began movements which later came to fruition after the lifetime of the leader. It always testified to the living God and His demands. The observation is true. We need to believe it.

A simple challenge flows from this observation. Determine to demonstrate spiritual leadership all of your life. Recognize the tendencies of aging. As a leader ages he or she tends to trust in competency, the system, financial resources, and other kinds of security and to lose that sense of needing to trust God in every aspect of leadership. Leaders tend to plateau in terms of spirituality and disciplines that renew it. Every stage of development is different and will carry with it new challenges, rewards, and problems. Determine to make a difference. Persevere in that determination.

The Overall Impact of the 4 Observations

I hope you will agree that my four observations are fraught with leadership implications.

Observation 1. Few leaders finish well.

Observation 2. Leadership is difficult.

Observation 3. God's enabling presence is the essential ingredient of successful leadership.

Observation 4. Spiritual leadership can make a difference.

The first two are negative and carry strong implications of warning. We need these warnings or we may easily be sidelined. Forewarned may indeed forearm us with determination to overcome. The final two are more positive. Overcoming is possible if we remember that it is God's presence that insures our leadership. We must have it. Intimacy with God and spiritual disciples which insure it are means and ends that must be continually cultivated all our lives. Finally our lives can make a difference. If we heed these four observations then we should cry out one in heart with Moses,

So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom...and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us: yea, the work of our hands establish thou it. (Psalm 90:12,17)

Footnotes

- ¹Such as the prophet Ahijah (I Kings 11), the unknown man of God (I Kings 13), Micaiah (I Kings 22), Nathan and Gad, two of David's personal prophets. These appear fleetingly on the Biblical stage, perform some leadership function or two and are heard of no more. Numerous Jewish local civil leaders in the Old Testament are listed in special lists, several in the Pentateuch and several in I Chronicles, with nothing more than a name mentioned. See also Nehemiah and Ezra for other such lists.
- ²Leaders like Moses, David, Paul, and Jesus have an overwhelming amount of material to analyze. Many have some data. Even those having data do not always give the data needed to ascertain how they finished.
- ³I listed Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Joseph, Moses, Miriam, Aaron, Eleazar, Joshua, Caleb, Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Iban, Elon, Abdon, Samson, Eli, Samuel, Saul, David, Absalom, Solomon, Jeroboam, Rehoboam, Abijah, Baasha, Asa, Omri, Ahab, Elijah, Micaiah, Jehosaphat, Joram, Elisha, Obadiah, Jerhoram, Jehu, Joel, Ahaziah, Athaliah, Joash, Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Amaziah, Jeroboam II, Jonah, Amos, Uzziah, Zechariah, Shallum, Menaham, Jotham, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Hoshea, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Nahum, Amon, Josiah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Jehoahaz, Daniel, Jehoakim, Jehoachin, Zedekiah, Ezekiel, Esther, Mordecai, Zerubabel, Joshua, Zechariah, Haggai, Ezra, Nehemiah, Malachi, Jesus, Peter, James, John, Barnabas, Paul, Stephen, Phillip, Titus, Timothy.
- ⁴I actually made judgments of this for 49.
- ⁵Typical examples of those cut off early include: Abimelech, Sampson, Absalom, Ahab, Josiah, James.
- ⁶Some who in my opinion are typical examples of "finished poorly" include: Gideon, Sampson, Eli, Saul, Solomon.
- ⁷Some who in my opinion are typical examples of finished "so so" include: David, Jehosaphat, Hezekiah. There are also many who seem to bridge more than one category (cut-off and finished poorly, cut-off and finished "so so," finished "poorly" and "so so" or finished "so so" and "somewhat well." The categories are not always mutually exclusive.
- ⁸Some who in my opinion are typical examples of "finished well" include: Abraham, Job, Joseph, Joshua, Caleb, Samuel, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jesus, John, Paul, Peter.
- ⁹Many times the decisions were simply "on-the-spot" reactions to a given crisis situation. Sometimes they were calculated. Frequently the Bible indicates that the situation was engendered by God to test the leader.
- ¹⁰My findings are available in two books, **The Making of A Leader** published by Nav Press in 1988 and a lengthy detailed self-study manual that I privately publish for use in classes at Fuller, **Leadership Emergence Theory**.
- ¹¹Helpful categorizations for me which I derived from my study of Willard include the following: 1) Disciplines of abstinence such as solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice; 2) Disciplines of engagement such as

study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission; 3) Some other miscellaneous disciplines such as voluntary exile, keeping watch, sabbath keeping, practices among the poor, journalling, and listening. I have defined many of these disciplines and given some practical suggestions for them in my spiritual dynamics course I teach at Fuller Seminary. See Dallas Willard's **The Spirit of the Disciplines** and Richard Foster's **Celebration of Discipline**.

¹²I have developed a reading continuum which identifies different techniques for approaching the reading of a book for information. The continuum moves from less intense and less in-depth reading to highly intense and in-depth reading. Methodologies along the continuum include scan, ransack, browse, pre-read, read and study levels. Each type of reading has different goals and employs different techniques for getting information leading to those goals. See my **Reading on the Run--A Continuum Approach to Reading**.

¹³This model could be generalized to any kind of special learning activity like listening to tapes and experiential visits to ministry happenings or the like. The dynamics of the model include co-mentoring, accountability, committal to learning and some kind of learning experience.

¹⁴For example see the following Psalms: 27:12; 31:12,13,18; 35:4,11,12,15,16,20; 37:12,13; 38:12.

¹⁵For example, Galatians is defending Paul's apostolic authority, particularly his revelation of the Gospel. In II Corinthians Paul gives many personal leadership values on which he bases his personal conduct and view of the ministry. Almost all of these are answering criticisms concerning himself or his ministry. ¹⁶See Dennish Wrong's book, **Power--Its Forms, Bases, and Uses**.